

By Marc Lourdes, St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
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ST. LOUIS — To the Osage tribe, Sugar Loaf Mound is every bit an icon of St. Louis as the Gateway Arch.

So it's not surprising that the tribe has purchased the ancient piece of land, the last remaining American Indian mound in St. Louis.

The Osage tribe, which traces its ancestry to the ancient mound-building people who erected massive earthworks such as Cahokia Mounds in Collinsville, said Friday it had purchased the mound for about \$230,000. The couple who owned it put it up for sale last fall. The address is 4420 Ohio Street.

Osage Nation Principal Chief Jim Gray described the purchase as "a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

"One only has to look across the river to Cahokia Mounds to realize a vast civilization that rivaled any of its day once existed here," Gray said. "This is something that has been in the back of our minds. This city was known as Mound City before it was called St. Louis. And all those mounds are gone."

St. Louis once was home to more than 40 mounds. All but Sugar Loaf were destroyed by urban development by 1904.

The Oklahoma-based tribe plans to demolish the 900-square-foot house on top of the mound as well as two others at its base and develop the property as an interpretive historical site.

The Osage are still in discussions with other groups on working out details for the interpretive site. The aims are preservation and education.

One suggestion, from the Great Rivers Greenway District and the Confluence Partnership, has been to make Sugar Loaf a centerpiece of a new riverfront trail in south St. Louis. Confluence Partnership director Laura Cohen suggested a Mounds Heritage Trail that would link Sugar Loaf to Cahokia and other Indian sites in the region.

One thing that will not be allowed at the site: archaeological digs.

The director of the Tribal Historic Preservation Center, Dr. Andrea Hunter, said the tribe's main concern is in preserving the mound.

U.S. Rep. Russ Carnahan, D-St. Louis, who last November contacted the Osage Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office regarding the potential to preserve the mound, welcomed the purchase.

"I'm pleased the Osage Nation has taken steps to preserve this property for future generations and look forward to the area being used for historic and educational purposes," he said.

Carnahan was one of several politicians, including St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay, south St. Louis Aldermen Kenneth Ortmann, 9th Ward, and Craig Schmid, 20th Ward, as well as archaeologists and preservationists who wrote letters to support the Osage tribe's plans.

The mound's previous owners — an elderly couple — had decided to move to California to live closer to relatives.

Gray said the tribe hopes that sacred burial grounds and areas of geographic and historic importance will be better protected. "We can't fix the past, but we can preserve and protect what we still have for future generations," Gray said.

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